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SUGGESTIONS FOR THE PREPARATION OF AN
EXPOSITORY SERMON ON THE EIGHTH
CHAPTER OF ROMANS.

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There are sure indications of a revival of expository preaching. This is one of the best homiletic signs of the times. All too long has the topical sermon held sway in English and American pulpits. This species of discourse, while favorable to logical unity of plan and orderly progress of development, is in danger of being more philosophical than Scriptural in material and tone. Congregations are now asking their pastors, more and more, for the simple, practical unfolding of the contents of the Word of God, apart from severe logical reasoning and deep philosophical explanation. They believe that Scripture truth is intrinsically persuasive, carrying its urgent message to the deepest intuitions of the human heart.

The modern method of Bible study has much to do with this change in the trend of Christian preaching. Especially potent is the study of the books of the Bible in the unity of their contents as secured by the aim of the writer. This makes against the study of the Scriptures in the old piecemeal fashion—in isolated verses and paragraphs, and naturally leads to the consideration, in the Sunday school and in the pulpit, of an extended and connected portion of the Word of God. Some ministers now grapple with an entire book of the Bible, certainly with a whole chapter, as the basis of a single sermon.

The eighth chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans admirably yields itself to the purpose of the expository preacher. It is the object of this article to offer some general suggestions concerning the ground to be covered by the preacher in his mediate and immediate preparation of a sermon based upon it.

First of all, he needs to bring to the chapter a homiletic temper. He must insist upon it with himself that he is to make a sermon and not merely to expound. And this for at least two reasons. One is, that Paul was in a homiletic mood when he dictated the letter, which is essentially a discourse with a distinctively practical and persuasive aim. The preacher who overlooks this will be sure to miss the fervor and rush of the apostle's thoughts, and so, for preaching purposes, will miss nearly everything. The other reason is, that there is a wide difference between real preaching and mere expounding—all the difference, indeed, between preaching and no preaching at all. Expository sermons, falsely so-called, have been often deemed, and rightly, the driest sort of theological dust, largely because preaches have forced upon their audiences disconnected, detailed, and often scholastic, explanation of successive words, clauses and verses, with no attempt at wisely selecting materials and organizing them into a pointed, practical spiritual end.

Before a preacher can prepare an expository sermon on the chapter in hand, he must clearly answer this question: Just what was Paul's object in writing this letter? This arises from the closely reasoned character of it. The eighth chapter belongs, by a severe logical necessity, exactly where it is found. It forms a splendid climax of a particular section of the epistle, and this the preacher cannot appreciate until he has tested it in the light of Paul's controlling aim.

The next homiletic inquiry: With what special topic of the letter is this chapter vitally allied? In his attempt to settle this matter the preacher will find himself led back to the opening of the sixth chapter. In the first five chapters the varied aspects of justification by faith are dealt with. From the sixth chapter through the eighth the line of thought is concerned with the influence of justification by faith upon character. Or, in other words, Sanctification is the special subject. Here the preacher's homiletic eyes will open wide and his homiletic heart will thrill with delight as he discovers the prominent place that character holds in this most logical, formal, abstruse letter of Paul's writing. He will find that justification by faith is no mechanical, barren way of salva-

tion, but that it brings forth fruit unto righteousness, joy, peace, triumph.

What now,—and this is the next homiletic step,—are the chief contents of this eighth chapter? A thoughtful and sympathetic study of the chapter will fairly ravish the preacher, as he discovers the wealth and preciousness of this portion of the Scriptures. He will see that it contains the very flower of the Gospel, and from his inmost heart he will thank God that he is a preacher of Christian righteousness. He will say, as Godet tells that Spenser is reported to have said, “that if Holy Scripture was a ring, and the Epistle to the Romans its precious stone, chapter eighth would be the sparkling point of the jewel.” I venture the statement that in common with the Sermon on the Mount, the parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son, the fourteenth chapter of John, the thirteenth and fifteenth of First Corinthians, and the third chapter of Phillipians, the eighth chapter of Romans is the most read and the best loved of any portion of the New Testament.

A vital part of the mastery of the contents of the chapter is the study of its capital words and phrases. Among these are: condemnation, spirit, life, flesh, death, law, sins, heirs, suffer, glorified, expectation, creation, subjected, purpose, bondage of corruption, liberty of the glory of the children of God, groaneth and travaileth, with patience wait for it, conformed to the image of his son, the first-born among many brethren, and nearly every word from verse 31 to verses 39. In no other chapter of the Bible is found a larger, richer cluster of what may be termed the technical words of Christianity. These demand critical study of him who would preach intelligently and powerfully on this great chapter.

The final stage of the homiletic process is, the organization of the chief thoughts of the chapter. And just here it should be emphatically said that success in making an expository sermon on this chapter depends indispensably upon the preacher's rigid determination to reject material of prime homiletic value. If this is not done, his effort is doomed to inevitable and discouraging failure. Expository sermons on even brief passages of Scripture are seriously exposed to the

peril of being overloaded with subject-matter. Here more than almost, or quite, anywhere else is to be found the secret of the failure of so much expository preaching. It is at once both heavy and dry. When the sermon is an outgrowth of an entire chapter, and especially one so affluent in admirable preaching stores as the eighth of Romans, the problem of exclusion becomes immensely more difficult and imperative.

In offering suggestions as to the outline of an expository sermon on this chapter, only the most general ones can, or ought, to be brought forward. For every preacher must be left to his own homiletic individuality, if the sermon shall be his, and so be fresh, striking, powerful. Homiletic teaching becomes mechanical, fruitless, deadening when instead of presenting suggestive, living principles it prescribes a method that must be inflexibly used, a single mould into which every sermon must be run. It will be noticed, however, by every thoughtful student of this chapter that there are certain outstanding truths which must find permanent recognition in a sermon based upon it. It shall be my aim to state what, in my judgment, those truths are.

The preacher could start out with the first verse as the main thought of the sermon, and unfold that thought by offering the reasons the chapter presents why every kind of condemnation is removed from "them who are in Christ Jesus." Those reasons, it will be found, centre in and cluster about the Holy Spirit and his work in the Christian believer. Or, this truth could be elevated to foremost place in the discourse, and be phrased somewhat thus: The Fruits of the Holy Spirit in the Christian Believer. By this order the Christian hearers would be left to infer for themselves that they are free from condemnation, or the preacher could infer this for them in the progress of the sermon, or he could come around to it prominently in the conclusion.

Taking, then, "*The Fruits of the Holy Spirit in the Christian Believer*," as the subject, by the aid of what truths shall it be unfolded and enforced? The following will hold conspicuous place:

I. The Holy Spirit frees the Christian believer from the power of sin and of death (vs. 1-11).

First, from the power of sin, because of the holiness of the Christian believer.

Secondly, from the power of death. (1) Spiritual, because of the spiritual life of the believer produced by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. (2) Physical, because of the quickening energy of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

II. The Holy Spirit secures to the Christian believer the privilege of an adopted Son of God, and of a joint heir with Christ of glory (vs. 12-17).

Between this topic and the next there is call for a skilful transition growing out of the inevitable condition of the believer's *suffering* with Christ in order to *glorification* with him.

III. Incentives to the patient endurance of the sufferings which precede the glory that the Holy Spirit guarantees to the Christian believer (vs. 18-30).

First, the greatness of the glory.

Secondly, the intercession of the Holy Spirit.

Thirdly, the purpose of God to glorify the Christian believer.

IV. The triumphant assurance of the Christian believer's final salvation (vs. 31-39).

First, in view of God's agency in guarding his own.

Secondly, in view of Christ's agency in permitting no one or no thing to separate his own from his love.

This last topic, together with its twofold development, can most effectively be used in the form of a *conclusion* of the sermon.

Instead of having but one sermon on the entire chapter, as has now been suggested, there could well be four sermons. In that case the materials offered by the chapter could be more minutely used. I should prefer, however, a single discourse, partly for the sake of the preacher's gaining discipline in dealing with a long passage of Scripture, and partly to let a congregation *grasp*, without a break, the wealth of the truth of this splendid chapter, and *feel*, all at once, the impact of it upon their characters and lives—"the chapter," as one has well exclaimed, "beginning with *no condemnation* and ending with *no separation*!"

From this brief outline study it will be seen how comprehensive and how difficult a work it is to make an effective expository sermon on a single chapter of a book of the Bible. It will be seen also, I trust, how inviting a work it is, leading the preacher over priceless tracts of richest ore in the mine of God's revealed truth. If our present ministry will gain their cordial consent to explore this mine for themselves, and will bring forth to their audiences the treasures of truth they find there, great will be their reward in enriching their own minds and hearts with the truth as it is in Jesus, and in building up their churches in the strength and symmetry of commanding Christian character.